

*Former Admiral Continues Push for Transparency in Veterans Healthcare*

March 5, 2010

**Washington, DC** –In a meeting on Thursday with Dr. Robert A. Petzel, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Health, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) discusses ways to move forward after a number of inadequacies in the care of Pennsylvania Veterans have been uncovered over the past year. Incidents included prostate cancer surgery malpractice and the release of several disturbing reports that uncovered unacceptable conditions at the Philadelphia Community Living Center (CLC) and Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center (PVAMC) thoracic surgery unit. Since September, the Congressman has exchanged a number of letters with the VA expressing his dismay with these inadequacies, culminating in this meeting with Under Secretary Petzel.

"I want to be a strong proponent of the VA, but we need to have a transparent review of facilities that care for our Veterans to ensure credibility for our former service members," said the Congressman. "I explained to Dr. Petzel that my objective is to work with the VA to assure our citizens, Veterans, and their families that transparency, oversight, and accountability are integral to every aspect of the VA's management and leadership.

"I appreciate Dr. Petzel's support for the working group I am setting up with my lead staff member on Veterans issues and the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. We agreed that there is a need to go back over other past reports to ensure there are no other instances of inadequate care. I received his assurance that I would not be surprised by any more leaked quality-assurance reports, and that an opportunity would be provided to be briefed on those reports that still have not been released."

Last October, the Congressman introduced H.R. 3843, the Transparency for America's Heroes Act. This bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make available on the VA website redacted records and documents created by the VA as part of a medical quality-assurance program. This would provide parity with the current practice of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, which publishes nursing home inspection reports online.

"We have a reporter at the Philadelphia Inquirer who brought to light the problems associated with the prostate cancer treatments. The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review broke the story of conditions in the CLC," said Congressman Sestak. "Last month, once again, it required a reporter from the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review and a FOIA request to alert the public to another instance of substandard care for our Veterans.

"I understand that until 2007, the VA had been grossly underfunded for decades and that for too long VA employees were asked to do too much with too little. However, as the nation finally makes the investment it should in the health care of our Veterans, we must be certain that those taxpayer dollars are applied to a medical system that is caring, effective, and efficient. The only way to do that is to build a better inspection program that is based on accountability and transparency."

In continuing his efforts to provide Veterans the treatment and resources they have earned,

Congressman Sestak will host his fourth annual Veterans Summit on Monday, March 8, 2010 at Ridley High School starting at 6 PM. The event will feature a service fair to connect local Veterans, Active Duty Military Members, and their families with representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs; Veterans Service Organizations; companies interested in hiring or doing business with Veterans; local Colleges and Universities to help Veterans utilize their 21st Century GI Bill benefits; and others that provide services to the Veterans community. In addition, the Congressman will present Judith Nickel of Brookhaven, Pennsylvania with the Silver Star awarded posthumously to her brother, SPC 4 Barry Burnite of Springfield for his heroism in the Ia Drang Valley during the Vietnam War. Those interested in attending can RSVP either by calling the Congressman's District Office at 610-892-8623 or by visiting his website (<http://www.sestak.house.gov>).

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, the Congressman was the first Director of Deep Blue, the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the Global War on Terrorism. He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Congressman Sestak is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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